

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office San Diego
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Office San Diego

Earth Day 2003:

San Diego's Coast Guard Balances Homeland Security and Environmental Stewardship.

SAN DIEGO – Despite greatly increased Port Security duties in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks and the change to the Department of Homeland Security; the Coast Guard remains committed to protecting the sensitive marine environments of San Diego. In addition to minimizing oil spills and their effect, the Coast Guard is getting boaters to properly dispose their sewage by increasing public awareness.

Coast Guard Continues to Keep Waters Clean

Coast Guard Marine Safety Office San Diego's area of responsibility includes some 70 Navy ships, 27 port facilities that handle oil, 42 marinas and fuel docks, and 700 square miles of navigable water along the Colorado River. In the year 2002, the Coast Guard investigated 238 oil spills, a decrease from 336 in 2001. The majority of these spills were less than 1 gallon. The decreasing trend in the number of oil spills since 1996 is an indicator of heightened public awareness and increased response and surveillance. The Coast Guard works in concert with other federal and state agencies to prevent environment damage from oil spills by investigating reports of spills, ensuring that spills are cleaned up when possible, holding spillers accountable and working with mariners to identify and remedy causes of spills. Another environmental concern is sewage from boats. Within three miles from shore, it is illegal to discharge sewage from a vessel's holding tank untreated. It should be noted that within San Diego Bay, even treated discharges are prohibited. The use of pump-out facilities is encouraged.

Historic Plan Approved

The Joint Contingency Plan between the United Mexican States and the United States of America (MEXUS Plan) regarding Pollution of the Marine Environment by Discharges of Hydrocarbons or other Hazardous Substances provides guidance for coordination for pollution incidents that may represent a threat to the coastal waters or the marine environment of the border zone of both countries. An agreement further delineating coordination on the west coast was signed by the Coast Guard and the Mexican Navy in Ensenada, Mexico on February 26, 2003. This agreement streamlined the process for each country to assist the other in case of an oil or hazardous material spill and, therefore, has enhanced the protection of the entire region.

***To report a pollution incident
call the Coast Guard's
National Response Center at
800-424-8802.***

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